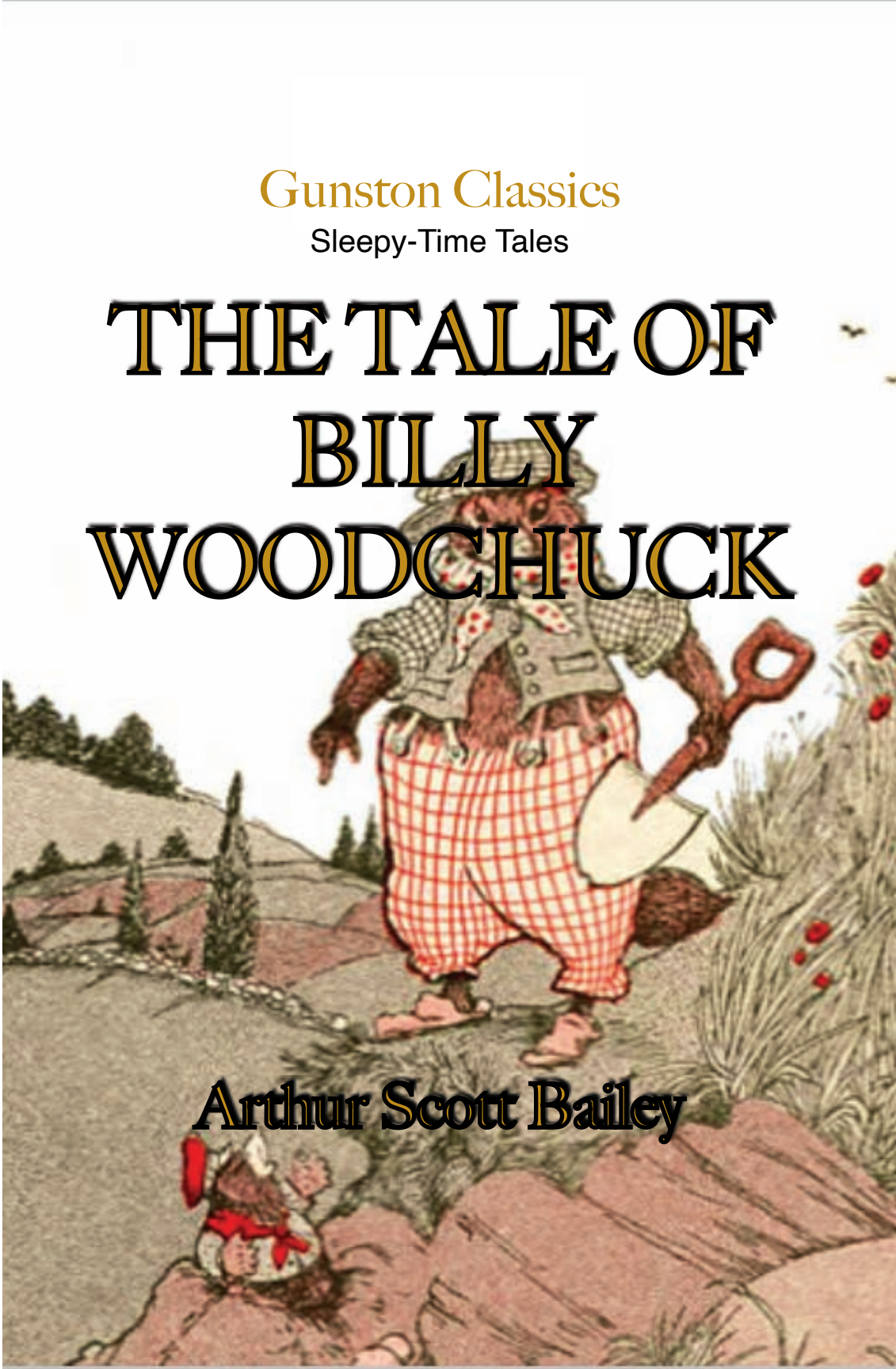
Gunston Classics

Sleepy-Time Tales

# THE TALE OF BILLY WOODCHUCK



Arthur Scott Bailey

Gunston & The Book Bunnies

The Gunston Trust

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# THE TALE OF BILLY WOODCHUCK


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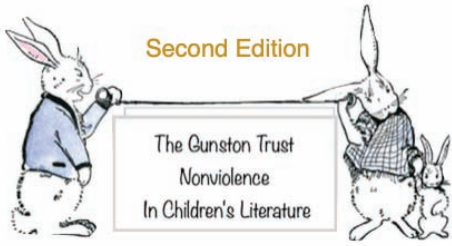



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Billy Woodchuck Often Dug Holes in the Pasture

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# THE TALE
# OF
# BILLY WOODCHUCK

# THE TALE OF BILLY WOODCHUCK

## I

## THE HOUSE IN THE PASTURE

One day, when Johnnie Green tramped over the fields toward the woods, he did not dream that he walked right over somebody's bedroom. The snow was deep, for it was midwinter. And as Johnnie crossed his father's pasture he thought only of the fresh rabbit tracks that he saw all about him. He had no way of knowing that beneath the three feet of snow, and as much further below the top of the ground too, there was a snug, cozy little

room, where Mr. and Mrs. Woodchuck lay sound asleep on a bed of dried grass.

They had been there all winter, asleep like that. And there they would stay, until spring came and the grass began to grow again.

In summer Johnnie Green was always on the watch for woodchucks. But now he never gave them a thought. There would be time enough for that after the snow was gone and the chucks came crawling out of their underground houses to enjoy the warm sunshine.

Usually it happened in just that way, though there had been years when Mr. and Mrs. Woodchuck had awakened too soon. And then when they reached the end of the long tunnel that led from their bedroom into Farmer Green's pasture they found that they had to dig their way through a snow-bank before they reached the upper world where Johnnie Green lived.

But this year their winter's nap came to a close at just the right time. A whole month had passed since Johnnie walked over their house. And now when they popped their heads out of their front door they saw that the snow was all gone and that the sun was shining brightly. Almost the first thing they did was to nibble at the tender young grass that grew in their dooryard.

When you stop to remember that neither of them had had so much as a single mouthful of food since long before Thanksgiving Day you will understand how hungry they were. They were very thin, too. But every day they grew a little fatter. And when at last Johnnie Green passed that way again, late one afternoon, to drive the cows home to be milked, he thought that Mrs. Woodchuck looked quite well.

She looked happy, too, just before Johnnie came along. But now she had a worried air. And it was no wonder, either. For she had five new children, only a few weeks old, and she was afraid that Johnnie would take them away from her.

Poor, frightened Mrs. Woodchuck ran round and round her five youngsters, to keep them all together. And all the time she urged them nearer and nearer the door of her house.

Johnnie was already late about getting the cows. But he waited to see what happened. And soon he saw all five of the little chucks scramble through the doorway. And as soon as the last one was safely inside the old lady jumped in after her children.

That last one was the biggest of all the young chucks. Perhaps it was because he always ate twice as much as any of his brothers and sisters. His mother

found him harder to manage, too; and she had to push him along through the doorway, because he wanted to stop and snatch a bite from a juicy plantain.

That was Billy Woodchuck—that fat, strong youngster. Even then Johnnie Green knew that he was going to be a big fellow when he grew up.

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# II
# CALLING NAMES

Billy Woodchuck grew so fast that he soon looked very much like his father. Of course, he was still much smaller than Mr. Woodchuck. But like him, Billy was quite gray; and he had whiskers, too—though, to be sure, those were black. His eyes also were black and large and bright. When Billy sat up on his hind legs—as he often did—he appeared for all the world like a huge squirrel.

In fact, some of Billy's friends remarked how like a squirrel he looked. And one day when Billy was playing near the edge of the woods a disagreeable young hedgehog told him that. To tell the truth, Billy

Woodchuck had grown to be the least bit vain. He loved to gaze upon his bushy tail; and he spent a good deal of time stroking his whiskers. He hoped that the neighbors had noticed them.

Now, other people are always quick to see when anyone is silly in that way. And the young hedgehog thought that Billy Woodchuck needed taking down a peg. So he said to him:

"Why don't you join the circus?"

"Circus? What's that?" Billy asked.

"A circus is a place where they have all kinds of freaks," the hedgehog answered with a sly smile —"giants and dwarfs, and thin people and fat people."

"But I'm not a freak," Billy Woodchuck replied. "Of course, I'm big for my age. But I'm not a giant."

"Yes, you are," the hedgehog insisted.

"You're a giant squirrel. You look like him"—he pointed to a young fellow called Frisky Squirrel—"only you're ever so much bigger."

That made Billy Woodchuck very angry. And he began to chatter and scold.

Wise old Mr. Crow, who sat in a tree nearby, told him to keep his temper.

"Certainly you are not a squirrel," he said. "It is nonsense to say that a ground hog is the same as a squirrel——"

Billy Woodchuck's voice broke into a shrill scream. A ground hog! He was terribly angry.

"Why, yes!" Mr. Crow said, nodding his head with a knowing air. "You're a marmot, you know."

"No, I'm not!" Billy cried. "I'm a woodchuck! That's what I am. And I'm going home and tell my mother what horrid names you've been calling me."

"Just Crawl Inside that Old Stump!" Mr. Fox Said

Mr. Crow laughed. He said nothing more. But as Billy hurried away he could hear the young hedgehog calling:

"Ground hog! Marmot! Ground hog! Marmot!" over and over again.

Billy Woodchuck was surprised to see how calm his mother was when he told her those horrid names. He had rather expected that she would hurry over to the woods and say a few things to that young hedgehog, and to old Mr. Crow as well. But she only said:

"Don't be silly! Of course you're a ground hog. You're an American marmot, too. Though our family has been known in this neighborhood for many years as the Woodchuck family, you needn't be ashamed of either of those other names. Isn't 'ground hog' every bit as good a name as 'hedgehog?'"

Billy Woodchuck began to think it was. And as for "marmot"—that began to have quite a fine sound in his ears.

"Why can't we change our name to that?" he asked his mother.

But Mrs. Woodchuck shook her head.

"We are plain country people," she said. "Woodchuck is the best name for us."

## III

# MAGIC

One of the first things Mrs. Woodchuck taught her children was to beware of dogs and foxes, minks and weasels, skunks and great horned owls. She often made them say the names of those enemies over and over again.

For some time Billy Woodchuck was almost afraid to stir out of doors, for fear he might meet one of those creatures. But at last as he grew bigger he grew bolder, too. And he began to think that his mother was just a nervous old lady. Still, when he met a fox one day at the further end of the pasture Billy was somewhat frightened. But Mr. Fox seemed very

friendly. They talked together for a while. And then Mr. Fox said: "Do you like surprises?"

"I see you do like them," Mr. Fox continued. "Well, you just crawl inside that old stump over there. There's a hole in it, as you see. And in there you'll find something to surprise you." Mr. Fox stretched himself then. "I must go home now," he said. "I was out late last night and I feel like taking a nap." So off he trotted, with never a look behind him.

He was hardly out of sight before Billy Woodchuck hurried to the old stump and crawled inside. But so far as he could see, it was quite empty. And he was just about to leave when all at once it grew dark. That was because Mr. Fox had come back and thrust his head through the hole.

"Did you find it?" Mr. Fox asked him.

"No!" said Billy in a faint voice.

"Well, well!" said Mr. Fox. "I must be mistaken.... Yes, I know I am. It was in another stump. Just step outside and I'll show you which one." The hole was too small for him to squeeze through. If it had been bigger he would not have bothered to ask Billy to come out.

Mr. Fox pulled his head back and waited. But Billy Woodchuck did not appear.

Soon Mr. Fox took another look inside the hollow stump.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Aren't you coming?"

Then he had a surprise. For Billy Woodchuck was gone. Mr. Fox saw that the old stump was empty.

He thought that Billy must have used magic, to leave that place and run away under his very eyes. For you may be sure that Mr. Fox had kept a close watch on the hole all the time. And he told all his friends that

Billy Woodchuck knew a way to make himself invisible —a word which means that nobody could see him.

Later, when Billy heard what people were saying about him, he only looked wise and said nothing.

But he had been sadly frightened when Mr. Fox peeped inside the old stump. And he had made up his mind at once that he would not come out and be caught. He knew better than that. For now he believed everything his mother had told him about foxes.

As his bright eyes looked about his prison they soon spied a small hole which seemed to lead down into the ground. It was large enough for him to enter. And so he went right down out of sight.

Billy found himself in a long tunnel, which made him think of one that led to his own home. At the other end of it he came out into daylight again; and he knew then that it was an old woodchuck's burrow, in which

nobody lived any longer. And it was the back door that opened into the hollow stump.

Billy Woodchuck hurried home. He thought that Mr. Fox would stay near the old stump for some time, waiting for him to come out.

Although he had been so frightened, it was a good lesson for him. For he had learned that no matter how pleasant a fox might be, it was wise to have nothing to do with him.

# IV
# THE GREAT HORNED OWL

Billy Woodchuck knew that the Great Horned Owl was a dangerous person. His mother had often told him that. But he had never yet seen the Great Horned Owl; and Billy wondered how he should know him if he should ever happen to meet him. So Billy Woodchuck went indoors and asked his mother to tell him how the Great Horned Owl looked.

"He's a big fellow," said Mrs. Woodchuck —"almost as big as the Great Gray Owl and the Snowy Owl. But you can tell him from them by his ear-tufts, which stick up from his head like horns."

"What color is he?" Billy inquired.

"Buff and black," Mrs. Woodchuck answered. "He's mottled—that means about the same as spotted," she explained. "I've heard him called the 'tiger among birds.' But whether it's because of the spots, or because he's so fierce, I really don't know."

"Maybe it's both," Billy suggested.

"Perhaps!" his mother said. "He has a deep voice," she continued. "And he calls 'Whoo, hoo-hoo-hoo, whoo, whoo!' If you heard him in the woods you might almost think it was old dog Spot barking. But when he screams"—Mrs. Woodchuck shuddered—"then you'll know him. For his scream is the most dreadful sound that was ever heard."

"I wish you would scream like him once," said Billy.

"Bless your heart!" said his mother. "My voice may not be very sweet, but I never could screech like him."

"Why doesn't Johnnie Green shoot him?" Billy asked. "If he only would, the Great Horned Owl could never trouble us any more."

"Why, there's more than just one!" his mother exclaimed. "When I say 'the Great Horned Owl,' I don't mean just one!"

"Oh!" said Billy. That was different. And then he went out to play again.

For a long time he couldn't get the Great Horned Owl out of his mind. Every time he heard the leaves rustle in the trees he jumped as if forty Great Horned Owls were after him. But since nothing of the sort happened, at last he forgot all about that danger.

It was late in the afternoon when a horrid call sent him scurrying off:

"Whoo, hoo-hoo-hoo, whoo, whoo!"

Billy Woodchuck was sure that the Great Horned Owl had found him at last. He ran a little way as fast as he could; and then he crouched down in the grass.

Again came that deep, long-drawn call. It sent Billy off on another short run.

And after that had happened three times, he was so scared that he thrust his head under a heap of dried leaves. So long as he couldn't see the Great Horned Owl, he thought that the Great Horned Owl couldn't see him.

Then Billy heard his mother's voice. She was calling him. And he looked up quickly. There she was, right beside him!

"Did you drive him away, Mother?" he asked.

"Whom do you mean?" she inquired.

"Why, the Great Horned Owl!" Billy said.

"I was the only one that called," she told him. "I wanted to see what you would do. And I must say, you behaved very foolishly. Don't ever cover up your head like that. First, you must try to get away. And if you should get caught, remember that your teeth are sharp. But they won't be of any use to you with your head buried under a pile of leaves."

Billy Woodchuck saw that he had a great deal to learn. But he was glad that his mother had taught him that much, though he was ashamed that he had been so silly.

# V
# BILLY STANDS GUARD

Old Mr. Woodchuck had a great deal of time on his paws. He was always telling people how a stone once rolled off a wall on top of him and hurt his back, so he was not strong enough to do much work. On pleasant days he was usually to be found sunning himself. And often when he leaned his lame back against a tree where the sun fell squarely upon him he would fall asleep and stay there for hours at a time.

Though he did no work at all, his appetite was always good. And when he heard that there were ripe

"What's the Matter?" Billy Asked

apples, or lettuce, or some other dainty to be had, he always managed to get to the feast about as early as anybody else. At such times he seemed to forget how much his back hurt him.

There came a day when Mr. Woodchuck dashed home on a run. At first his wife thought there must be a fox chasing him. But as soon as he caught his breath (he was so fat that running always made him puff), he told Mrs. Woodchuck that a party of his friends was going to make a raid on Farmer Green's clover-field.

"I'm going with them," he said.

"Do you think you ought to?" she asked. "Isn't it too far? Isn't your back too lame?"

Mr. Woodchuck clapped his hands to his back and groaned a bit.

"They say there's nothing better for my trouble than tender young clover-heads," he replied. "So I think I ought to go.... What I came home for is this:

We want some spry young fellow to come along with us and be a sentinel. And I'm going to take Billy. He's old enough now to make himself of some use."

"I don't want him to go," Mrs. Woodchuck said. "He's only a child."

"He has ears, hasn't he? And eyes?" her husband replied. "It's time he helped me a little, after all I've done for him."

Billy Woodchuck was sure that he wanted to go. He was listening to every word.

"What's a sentinel?" he asked.

"A sentinel is a guard," his father told him. "It is his duty to sit upon a knoll and watch for men and dogs, while his friends eat the clover. And if he sees or

hears a man or a dog—or any other enemy—he whistles as loud as he can. That's the danger signal. And just as soon as they hear it, all the other chucks run away."

"Please let me go, Mother!" Billy begged.

"It's very dangerous," Mrs. Woodchuck objected.

"No danger at all!" Mr. Woodchuck said. "Come on!"

And off they went, though Mrs. Woodchuck was far from pleased.

Mr. Woodchuck hurried over to a big oak, where his friends were waiting for him. There were almost a dozen of them—fat, elderly gentlemen. But they were very spry about reaching the clover-field.

Billy felt proud as a peacock when they left him alone on a knoll at the edge of the clover-patch and told him to keep a sharp ear out.

"And remember! At the first sign of danger, you must give a loud, shrill whistle," his father warned him. Then Mr. Woodchuck hurried away.

Billy could see his father and the others eating clover-tops as fast as they could pull them off. And he soon began to think that they were having more fun than he was. He grew tired of sitting still in one place. And just a little distance away he noticed a clump of fine clover. As the tops waved gently in the breeze they seemed to beckon to him.

Soon Billy was eating clover, too. And it was so good that he forgot all about being a sentinel. He forgot all about listening for danger. And then all at once he heard a cry:

"Sick him, Spot!"

It was Johnnie Green calling to his dog.

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# VI
# BILLY FORGETS TO WHISTLE

When Billy Woodchuck turned around he saw that dog Spot was coming straight toward him. Billy dropped the big clover-top he was just cramming into his mouth; and he ran as fast as he could go for a little way. Then he stopped and crouched low in the thick clover. But old Spot came bounding after him.

Again Billy made a quick dash. Again he stopped to hide. And this time what should he see right in front of him but the door of an old woodchuck's burrow! He whisked inside it in a hurry and plunged headlong down to the long tunnel, where he knew he

was safe. Above him he could hear old Spot barking, and Johnnie Green talking. But he was no longer afraid.

Then suddenly Billy remembered that he was a sentinel. And he had forgotten to whistle! He had forgotten to warn his father and his friends that they were in danger!

Billy Woodchuck wondered what would happen to them. Though Spot soon stopped barking, Billy did not dare leave his hiding place. He only hoped that the old chucks had heard the noise and had run away in time. Of course, he would be very sorry if any of them should get caught—especially his father. And yet the more he thought, the surer he was that if his father reached home the old gentleman would be very angry. No matter what happened, Billy Woodchuck saw that he was in great trouble.

It was almost dark when Billy at last left the old burrow and stole home. Even before he had reached the end of the long tunnel he could hear a loud groaning in the family bedroom beyond.

It was his father. And as Billy slipped inside the chamber he saw that his mother was bending over Mr. Woodchuck and trying to quiet him.

"What's the matter?" Billy asked.

And at that Mr. Woodchuck sprang to his feet. But his wife made him lie down again. And she seemed pleased to see her son once more.

"Your father has been in a fight," Mrs. Woodchuck said. "When the dog chased him he ran into an old woodchuck's burrow."

"That's just what I did, too!" Billy exclaimed.

"Yes; but there was a weasel in the one in which your father hid," his mother explained.

"And your poor father's nose is badly bitten."

"It's all his fault," Mr. Woodchuck said, meaning Billy, of course. "He was a sentinel—and he ran away without warning us."

"I didn't have time," Billy whimpered.

"If he were a soldier, he would be shot," his father said, crossly.

Mrs. Woodchuck told her husband that he had better try to go to sleep.

"I said that Billy was too young to take to the clover field," she reminded him.

Mr. Woodchuck groaned again.

"Does your nose still pain you?" she asked.

"It's my back," he answered. "I am afraid I hurt it again. And I don't suppose I shall be able to do another stroke of work all the rest of the summer."

Somehow, that did not seem to worry Mrs. Woodchuck at all. To tell the truth, she knew very well that her husband was lazy.

"I shall punish this boy to-morrow—if my back is strong enough," Mr. Woodchuck said.

But the next day Mr. Woodchuck was so busy sunning himself that he never found time to punish Billy after all.

She Took Hold of Billy's Ear

# VII
# GREEN PEAS

In Farmer Green's garden there were many things that Billy Woodchuck liked to eat. It seemed to him that every time he stole down there he found some new vegetable that was nicer than any he had tasted before. And one day he came upon something that was far sweeter and juicier than anything he had ever eaten.

Farmer Green's peas were just ready to be picked. Billy Woodchuck did not know what they were called. But that made no difference to him. He sat up

on his hind legs and pulled off the fat pods and ate the tender green peas greedily.

I should hate to say how long he stayed there. But it was a very long time. When he reached the garden-patch it had been so early in the morning that none of Farmer Green's family was astir. The sun rose while Billy was breakfasting. And after a while a door slammed now and then. But Billy Woodchuck never heard a sound, though the farmhouse was not far away. He was having such a good meal that he forgot everything else.

At last he could eat no more. He hated to stop. But he could not hold another mouthful. And now, as he looked around, he was startled to see Farmer Green's hired man walking toward him. The hired man had a hoe on his shoulder; and he was coming to work in the garden.

But Billy did not know that. He was sure that the man was after him. So he dropped down on all fours and started to run. He really did try to run. But to his surprise he could only drag himself along the ground.

The first thing that came into his head was the thought that he had been poisoned. He had heard of such things happening. What else could be the matter? His hind legs seemed too weak to hold up his body. Yes! As he pulled himself slowly along, his fat stomach actually dragged on the ground.

Of course, he could not go fast at all. But he managed to reach a shallow ditch, where he hid and rested for a time, though he expected any moment that the hired man would pounce on him.

But nothing of the sort happened; though he did hear the hired man say:

"Well, look at that! What will Mr. Green say when he knows this?"

And that made Billy shiver all over. For he knew exactly what the hired man meant.

After a while he crept along the ditch. He wanted to get home to his mother. And at last he reached the pasture, pulled himself through the long tunnel, and fell in the middle of the chamber floor and wept.

"Oh, dear!" he cried. "I can't run any more. I'm afraid I can never run again."

Mrs. Woodchuck took one look at him.

"What have you been eating?" she asked.

"Some little green balls," Billy answered.

"Where have you been eating them?" she inquired. To tell the truth, she was the least bit worried.

"It was down in Farmer Green's garden," he told her.

"Ah, ha!" said Mrs. Woodchuck. "Green peas!" she said. "Your father told me this very morning that they were ripe. You ate too many of them."

"Will I get better?" Billy asked her.

"Yes, indeed!" she replied. "But it's lucky no man came and found you like that. I don't believe you could ever have got away."

Billy Woodchuck said nothing more just then. But in a little while he asked his mother another question:

"Is it because they are in Farmer Green's garden that you call them green peas, Mother?"

# VIII
# A NEW GAME

Billy Woodchuck and Jimmy Rabbit often played together. Though they did not look the least bit alike, they agreed almost perfectly in one thing: they liked the same good things to eat. There was no place they would rather go than Farmer Green's garden.

But after he had had a bad fright one day, when dog Spot chased him away from the lettuce-bed, Jimmy Rabbit did not go near the garden for a long time. But he could not forget the taste of that crisp lettuce. So one day he said to Billy Woodchuck:

"How would you like to play a new game?"

"What is it?" Billy asked. "If it's fun, of course I'd like it."

"Well—did you ever play beggar?" Jimmy Rabbit asked him.

"No! What's it like?"

"It's like this," Jimmy told him. "You sit up on your hind legs, hold your hands in front of you, and let your head hang over on one side. And whenever anybody comes along you say: 'Please give me something to eat! Nothing has passed these lips for two days!'"

"B-but I've just had a good meal," Billy said. "And that wouldn't be true."

"Oh—this is just a game," Jimmy Rabbit said. "It's all right. It's often done. Everybody will understand."

"Well, then—where shall I sit?" Billy Woodchuck asked.

"I'd advise you to go down near Farmer Green's garden," said Jimmy—"there are so many people passing that way. I'll wait here for you. And when you get enough food given you, you can bring it right back here and I'll help you carry it home."

Billy Woodchuck thought that was very kind. So down he went toward Farmer Green's garden. And near the fence, beside the bridge across the brook, where the field-people often passed, he sat up just as Jimmy Rabbit had told him to.

Pretty soon he saw old Aunt Polly Woodchuck come along with a basketful of goodies which she had gathered in the garden.

"Please, ma'am, I'm hungry," Billy said. "Nothing has passed my lips for a whole week." He thought "a week" sounded far better than "two days."

Now, Aunt Polly was a very old lady and almost blind. She could not see how Billy's fat sides stuck out. And though she stopped and looked at him closely, she did not know him—for all he was the son of her own nephew.

"My, my!" she said. "How hungry you must be! Here—you just take this basket and go right home and have a good meal. I live 'way over there under the hill. And you can bring my basket home to-night."

Billy Woodchuck thanked her. He felt somewhat ashamed to take the peas and lettuce and apples and clover-heads. But he remembered it was only a game. And Jimmy Rabbit had said it was all right.

Old Aunt Polly Woodchuck trudged back to the garden again. And Billy hurried back to the place where Jimmy Rabbit was waiting.

"See what I've brought!" he said proudly. "Now you take hold of the other side of the basket and we'll carry it home to my mother."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," said Jimmy Rabbit.

"Why not?" asked Billy.

"Well—I just wouldn't. I forgot to remember that it's bad luck not to sit right down and eat whatever's given you like this. And you don't want to have bad luck."

Billy Woodchuck was sure he didn't.

"All right, then!" said Jimmy Rabbit. "And they say it's bad luck if you leave a single scrap uneaten. So I'll sit down too, and help you."

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# IX
# AT AUNT POLLY'S

After Jimmy Rabbit and Billy Woodchuck had eaten the very last goody in old Aunt Polly Woodchuck's basket, Jimmy said that he must hurry away at once.

"Don't you want to go with me while I take her basket home?" Billy asked him.

"I'd like to; but I can't," said Jimmy. "The basket's light, anyway. You won't have any trouble carrying it." And that was the truth. "If you want to play beggar again to-morrow, perhaps I can meet you

here once more," Jimmy added. "I'm always glad to help a friend, you know." And then he hopped away.

Billy Woodchuck trotted over to Aunt Polly's house under the hill. He hoped the old lady hadn't reached home yet, for he was afraid she might know who he was the next time she saw him.

Luckily she had not returned. And Billy left the basket just outside the door of her sitting-room and was hurrying back through her neat tunnel, when he heard voices.

And sure enough, as he crawled out of Aunt Polly's front door, there sat the old lady herself. And with her was Billy's own mother, who had come over to pay a call upon Aunt Polly and ask after her rheumatism.

"Well, if here isn't that poor little lad right now!" Aunt Polly exclaimed, the minute she saw Billy

Woodchuck. "He's just after bringing home my basket, I know." She had been telling Billy's mother about the starving youngster she had found.

"So this is the young beggar, is it?" Mrs. Woodchuck said. "I must say he looks very fat for a person who has had nothing to eat for a week."

Aunt Polly felt of Billy's pudgy sides.

"Dearie me! He doesn't seem thin, exactly," she agreed. "But you must remember he has just had one good meal."

"No doubt!" said Mrs. Woodchuck. "And it's the fourth, at least, that he's had to-day."

"You don't say so! You know him, then?" asked Aunt Polly.

"I'm ashamed to say I do," Mrs. Woodchuck answered. "I never thought I should be the mother of a beggar. But I see that I am. It can't be helped this time. But I

know how to keep it from happening again." She took hold of Billy's ear. "Come home with me, young man," she said.

Billy Woodchuck began to whimper.

"It was just a game!" he cried. "We were only playing. We were having fun."

"We? How many were there of you?" his mother asked.

"Two of us—me and Jimmy Rabbit!"

Mrs. Woodchuck was too upset to notice that Billy said me when he ought to have said I.

"I'd like to have Jimmy Rabbit's ear in my other hand," she told Aunt Polly.

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He Painted Two White Stripes on Uncle Jerry's Back

The Tale of Billy Woodchuck

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# X
# UNCLE JERRY CHUCK

Not only Mr. Woodchuck, but his friends as well, were angry with Billy, because he forgot to whistle a warning to them, when dog Spot caught them in the clover-patch. And whenever they met Billy Woodchuck anywhere they would scold at him, and tell him that he was a heedless, careless boy.

"It will be a long time before you have another chance to be a sentinel and listen for danger," Uncle Jerry Chuck told him.

After he heard that, there was nothing that Billy wanted to do so much as to stand guard again. Before,

he had been happy and contented. But now that he learned that there was something he mightn't do he knew he should never be satisfied until he did it.

Every day Billy went to one of his father's friends and asked him if he didn't want somebody to listen for him. But they all told him that he was a good-for-nothing rascal and bade him be off.

Finally Billy went to Uncle Jerry Chuck's house and fairly begged the old gentleman to let him do some listening.

The sly old gentleman had been waiting for just that thing. He was very fond of taking naps in the sunshine and he wanted to find some youngster like Billy, with sharp ears, to stay near him while he slept and waken him in case some enemy should see him.

Now, if Uncle Jerry had been willing to pay them, he might have found plenty of first-class listeners. But he was stingy.

He was always trying to get something for nothing. And now he said to Billy:

"I'll give you just one more chance. Maybe you learned a lesson down in the clover-patch. Perhaps you won't forget to remember to whistle, after what happened that time."

"No, Uncle Jerry!" said Billy Woodchuck. He was very polite. "When may I begin?" he asked.

"Right now!" Uncle Jerry told him. "Come with me, up on top of the big rock." And he walked off at once, with Billy at his side.

"But there's nothing for you to eat there," said Billy.

"Eat?" Uncle Jerry exclaimed. "I'm not going to eat. I'm going to sleep."

So Uncle Jerry Chuck went to sleep on top of the big rock. All the time he slept, Billy Woodchuck sat upon his hind legs
and listened with all his might and main. But his sharp ears caught no hint of danger.

After a while he began to wish that old Spot would come along—or a skunk or a fox. For it seemed as if Uncle Jerry never would wake up again.

Billy wouldn't have minded quite so much, if Uncle Jerry hadn't snored. But, of course, that made it much harder to listen.
At last Uncle Jerry Chuck opened his eyes and slowly rose to his feet and stretched himself.

"You've done very well, for a beginner," he told Billy. "Come back here to-morrow at the same hour and I'll try you again."

Now, Billy Woodchuck had done enough listening to last him for a long time. But he didn't know just how to tell that to Uncle Jerry. And almost before he knew it he found himself saying:

"Yes, sir!"

# XI
# BILLY ASKS FOR PAY

The next day, at the same hour, Uncle Jerry Chuck went to the big rock. This time he was looking forward to even a longer nap in the sun than he had had the day before. If Billy Woodchuck was willing to listen, without pay, Uncle Jerry was more than willing to let him.

Billy Woodchuck was somewhat late. But he arrived at last.

"You must be more prompt," Uncle Jerry told him, severely. "I have no time to waste waiting for a young chap like you. When I'm good enough to let you do my listening, it seems to me you ought to be on time," he

grumbled. That is often the way with people who get things for nothing. They are very likely to find fault.

Now, Billy Woodchuck had been doing some thinking since the day before. And while Uncle Jerry was hunting for a soft spot on the big rock, where he could lie, Billy suddenly surprised him by saying:

"Don't you think you ought to pay me for listening for you, Uncle Jerry?"

Uncle Jerry grunted. He was not at all pleased.

"This is not a good time to speak of pay," he said. "I am so sleepy that I can hardly keep my eyes open. However, I'll see what I can do for you—after I've had my nap."

And then he fell asleep, and snored ever so much louder than he had the previous day. He slept longer, too. And by the time he awakened, Billy

Woodchuck was quite worn out, and ready to fall asleep himself.

This time Uncle Jerry did not wait to stretch himself. As soon as he opened his eyes he leapt to his feet and started off.

"Meet me here to-morrow at the same hour," he ordered.

"But you haven't paid me for to-day!" Billy Woodchuck cried.

Uncle Jerry stopped.

"I declare, I'd forgotten all about that," he said. "I'll tell you what I'll do.... You know, turn about is fair play. So if you want to take a nap, you can lie right down here and take it. And I'll do more for you than you did for me. I'll keep track of the time. And when the sun gets over the big elm by the brook, I'll wake you up."

Billy Woodchuck agreed. And as soon as he was fast asleep Uncle Jerry left him.

You see, old Uncle Jerry Chuck was a sly old gentleman. He had said nothing at all about listening for danger.

So Billy Woodchuck slept on.

If the Great Horned Owl had happened along then, he could have caught Billy without any trouble.

But it was not Mr. Owl who passed that way, before the sun climbed above the big elm. Though some one did spy Billy, as he lay there sleeping.

Who do you suppose it was?

# XII
# WHAT JIMMY RABBIT SAW

It was Jimmy Rabbit who came along and caught sight of Billy Woodchuck, sound asleep on top of the big rock.

Jimmy was surprised. It seemed to him that it was a very careless thing to do. And while he was wondering whether he would just waken Billy, or play some trick on him, he saw Uncle Jerry Chuck come puffing up the hill and go to Billy and give him a good, hard shake.

Billy Woodchuck at once jumped up, rubbing his eyes to get the sleep out of them. And Uncle Jerry

started to waddle down the hill. But before he had gone far he turned around; and Jimmy Rabbit heard him call:

"Remember! To-morrow at the same hour!"

Jimmy wondered what he meant. He waited till Uncle Jerry was out of sight and then he stepped out from behind the blackberry bush where he was hiding and hopped over to the big rock.

"Hello, Billy!" he said. "What's going on to-morrow?"

"I listen, while Uncle Jerry sleeps," Billy explained. "And then, after he's had his nap, I sleep while he listens."

"Oh, ho!" said Jimmy Rabbit. "And where does he listen—if I may be so bold as to ask?" So long as he put his questions like that, Jimmy Rabbit always

seemed to think that he could ask anyone anything he wanted to.

"Why, he listens here," said Billy.

"What makes you think so? Did he say he would?"

"Yes—er—n-no! He said he would wake me up at this time," said Billy. "But, of course, he was right here all the while."

"Of course he was not!" said Jimmy. "When I first came along, you were all alone. And pretty soon I saw Uncle Jerry come up the hill and shake you. I tell you, it's lucky for you nothing happened, while you were taking your nap."

Billy Woodchuck saw that he had been tricked. And he was very angry. He was so angry that he wanted to run straight down to Uncle Jerry's house and tell him just what he thought about him.

But Jimmy Rabbit said "No!" He knew something better to do than that. "Let's see——" he said. "Didn't I hear Uncle Jerry mention something about 'to-morrow at the same hour'?" he asked.

"Y-y-e-s-s!" Billy Woodchuck was so angry that his teeth were chattering and clattering; and he found it very hard to talk.

"Well, then—you just lie low until to-morrow. Meet him here. Let him fall asleep. And then we'll teach him a good lesson."

Billy liked that idea. He liked it so well that he could hardly wait for to-morrow to come.

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# XIII

# A JOKE ON UNCLE JERRY

Well, the third day Uncle Jerry Chuck once more climbed to the top of the big rock to take his nap in the sun. And this time Billy Woodchuck was there ahead of him.

"Good!" said Uncle Jerry. "I see you're trying to do better. You're not late to-day.... Now, keep a sharp ear out while I'm asleep. And don't forget to give a loud whistle the moment you hear the least noise that—sounds—like——" He was asleep even before he finished what he had started to

say. And after taking a good look at him, Billy Woodchuck tiptoed away to a spot where he saw two long ears sticking out from behind a clump of milkweed.

"Is he asleep?" Jimmy Rabbit whispered.

"Yes!" said Billy.

"Then help me carry these pots of paint up where that old fraud is," said Jimmy Rabbit.

Billy Woodchuck obeyed. There was a pot of black paint and a pot of white. And besides all that, Jimmy had a whole armful of Indian paint brush, which grew thick in Farmer Green's pasture. He gave Billy Woodchuck a brush.

"Now," he whispered, "we'll paint this old fellow black."

Between them they soon covered Uncle Jerry Chuck with a thick coat of the black paint. And then Jimmy Rabbit stood off and squinted at the sleeper.

"So far, so good!" he said. "And now for the last touch of all! This has to be put on with care, so I shall do it myself."

And Billy Woodchuck watched him while he painted two broad, white stripes the length of Uncle Jerry's back. They began on the top of his head, so close together that they made just one line, and ended far apart, on either side of his tail.

"There!" Jimmy Rabbit whispered, when he had finished. "Does he look like anyone you know?"

"He looks exactly like Henry Skunk's father," said Billy Woodchuck. And he backed away. He was afraid of the Skunk family. "What are we going to do now?" Billy asked.

"First of all, we'll hide these pots of paint," said Jimmy. And as soon as they had done that Jimmy added: "Go up on the rock, whistle as loud as you can, and then run.... I'm going to hurry down the hill and see the fun."

Billy Woodchuck did exactly as he was told. And in no time at all his shrill whistle had awakened Uncle Jerry Chuck.

The old gentleman sprang up. He saw Billy, scurrying toward home. And without so much as a glance behind him to see what the danger might be, Uncle Jerry tore down the hill. He didn't know what was chasing him; but he was sure there was something.

On the way home he met Billy Woodchuck's father. And when Mr. Woodchuck saw him he fell right over backward, he was so frightened. For he, too, was

**Billy Carried Her Basket of Herbs**

afraid of the Skunk family.

Uncle Jerry thought that was queer. But he didn't stop. He ran into his house. And there another queer thing happened. The moment his wife caught sight of him she gave a scream and rushed out of the back door.

And for a long, long time after that there wasn't one of Uncle Jerry's family or his friends who would have anything to do with him.

He noticed another strange thing, too. Jimmy Rabbit and Billy Woodchuck were always following him. And whenever Uncle Jerry turned around quickly he was sure to catch them laughing. But whatever the joke was, he never could see it.

# XIV
# MR. FOX HAS AN IDEA

It was so long since Mr. Fox had tried to catch Billy Woodchuck in the hollow stump that Billy had begun to forget his fear of that sly fellow. And so when he met Mr. Fox in the woods one day Billy did not run as he had often done before. To be sure, he did not go too near Mr. Fox. And while they talked Billy watched the sharp-nosed gentleman with one eye; and the other eye he kept on a hole in the stonewall nearby. If Mr. Fox should come too close, Billy was ready to dive into that hole, where Mr. Fox could not reach him.

No one could have been pleasanter than Mr. Fox. "I'm so glad to meet you!" he said. "You're just the person I want to see. I've been told you are very musical."

Billy Woodchuck didn't know what he meant. But he did not say so.

"Yes," Mr. Fox went on. "They say you are the best whistler in Pleasant Valley."

That made Billy Woodchuck feel very proud.

"I can whistle pretty well," he said, throwing out his chest.

"And they tell me your two brothers are almost as good whistlers as you are—but not quite," added Mr. Fox, for he saw that Billy did not like that so well.

"Oh, they can whistle some. But I can beat them," Billy answered.

"I have an idea," said Mr. Fox. He really had a great many ideas in his head—more, probably, than any other of the
forest-people. "I'm very fond of music and I want to have a fife-and-drum corps."

"What's that? I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed Billy Woodchuck.

"Fifes and drums—they make music, you know," Mr. Fox explained. "Now, everybody knows that old Mother Grouse's sons are famous drummers."

Billy agreed that that was true. He had often heard the Grouse boys drumming in the woods.

"I've already spoken to them. And they are asking me every day when we are going to begin to practise," Mr. Fox continued. "But I couldn't think of any fifers until I happened to remember about you and your brothers."

"I don't know how to play a fife," said Billy. "I've never even seen one."

"Oh, that's nothing! You can hold a stick up to your mouth, and wriggle your fingers, and whistle. No one will know that you are not playing a fife. It will sound just the same. And the music will be just as sweet." Mr. Fox smiled at Billy. And Billy smiled at him.

"Good!" said Billy. "Will you bring the drummers to my house?"

"Well—no! Not just yet!" said Mr. Fox. "We ought to go off in the woods, where nobody can hear us, until we learn a tune. Then we can come and play for your mother. But I wouldn't say anything to her about the fife-and-drum corps if I were you. Let's surprise her!"

Billy thought that was a good idea.

"Bring your brothers over to my house late this afternoon," Mr. Fox said. "I'll have the Grouse boys there. And we can begin to learn to make music at once."

"Who will teach us?" asked Billy. "Do you know how to drum or whistle?"

"Don't you worry about that!" Mr. Fox answered. "I can teach you a thing or two." And he hurried away to find Mother Grouse's sons and tell them the good news.

# XV
# "POP! GOES THE WEASEL!"

Just as he had promised, Billy Woodchuck led his two brothers to Mr. Fox's house late in the afternoon, to join the fife-and-drum corps, and make sweet music.

The Grouse boys—all four of them—were already there and waiting to begin. And Mr. Fox was all smiles.

"Let's go further into the woods," he said. "I know a fine place, where we won't be disturbed." He had noticed that old Mr. Crow was sitting in the top of

a tall elm, and he did not care to have the old gentleman see what was going on.

So they followed Mr. Fox. And after a while he stopped close by a broad brook. He told Billy and his brothers just where to stand, and how to hold their short sticks so they would look like fifes.

The Grouse boys perched themselves high up on the trunk of a dead tree, which had fallen against a big oak and lay slanting between the oak and the ground.

"Come right down here!" Mr. Fox said to them.

But the Grouse brothers told him that they could drum much better where they were.

"What tune are we going to learn?" Billy Woodchuck asked.

Mr. Fox thought for a moment. And then he said:

"The first tune will be 'Pop! Goes the Weasel.'" He hummed it to them. And soon the Grouse boys

began to drum; and Billy Woodchuck and his brothers began to whistle.

Though they played very badly, Mr. Fox declared again and again that he was much pleased.

"But I seem to be a little too near the music," he said. "I want you all to face that way," he went on, pointing a paw over his shoulder. "And please keep on playing while I go off and see how the tune sounds further away."

So they began to play "Pop! Goes the Weasel," once more, while Mr. Fox, beating time all the while, backed slowly out of sight in the direction in which he had pointed.

They played and played. And at last Billy Woodchuck's lips began to feel very queer, puckered up as they were. And now and then not a single whistle came from his mouth, though he blew as hard

as he knew how. He was out of breath, too. And so were his brothers.

Billy was wondering why Mr. Fox did not come back, when his sharp ears caught a faint sound. It was no more than a dry leaf breaking. Neither you nor I could have heard it.

In spite of what Mr. Fox had said about looking straight ahead, Billy turned around. And he was always glad, afterward, that he had. For whom should he see behind him but Mr. Fox, stealing upon them with a horrid grin on his face!

The music stopped short. With one frightened scream Billy Woodchuck was off. He plunged into the brook, with his brothers right at his heels. And in no time at all they had swum across to the other side and vanished in the thick bushes.

At the water's edge Mr. Fox paused. If there was one thing he hated, it was getting his feet wet. The brook was too broad for him to jump; and when at last he found a place where he could cross by hopping from one stone to another, the Woodchuck boys were nowhere to be found.

But the Grouse brothers still sat on the dead tree, though they had moved to its very top; and they had stopped drumming.

"How did the music sound?" one of them asked.

"It was the worst I ever heard," Mr. Fox snarled.

The Grouse brothers snickered. And one of them invited Mr. Fox to come up where they were. But he never even thanked them.

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# XVI
# THE PLAY-HOUSE

As Billy Woodchuck grew bigger he was often to be seen digging holes in the pasture. You might think he was looking for something. But he was not. He was merely playing at making houses.

First he would dig a slanting hole down into the ground. And then from the bottom of that he would run a level tunnel. When his tunnel was as long as he wanted it, he would work his way upward for a short distance. And there he would make a chamber, much like the one at home.

Of course, Billy's play-houses were not so big as his mother's home. The front stairs were shorter, and the hall was not so long, and the chamber was smaller. But he thought they were wonderful. And he made up his mind that the next time Johnnie Green or dog Spot chased him he would run down into one of those play-houses and hide. Billy hoped that he would be chased soon.

He did not have to wait long. One evening when old Spot had started the last cow homeward he lingered in the pasture a while. If there was one thing he liked, it was chasing woodchucks.

When Billy Woodchuck caught sight of Spot, sniffing along the ground, he climbed up on a hummock, so that Spot could see him, and gave a loud whistle.

It didn't take old Spot long to see Billy. And as soon as he spied him he made a dash for him.

That was exactly what Billy Woodchuck wanted. He waited as long as he dared. And then he made off like a gray streak toward his newest house.

Old Spot saw his bushy tail disappear through the front door. And Spot looked down into the darkness and called Billy a few names.

He pawed and scratched at the door, too. But he was no such digger as Billy Woodchuck. And after a while he grew tired of staying there and went away.

That night, after Billy Woodchuck went home, he boasted about his newest play-house.

"It's exactly as good as this one," he bragged. "To-day old Spot chased me, and I ran into my house and he never touched me. After this I'm always going to hide there."

Billy's brothers and sisters thought he was very clever. But his mother said:

"I want to see that play-house. To-morrow you may show it to me."

That pleased Billy. It made him feel prouder than ever. And the next morning he was up bright and early. Sometimes he was very slow about dressing, because he stopped to play. And that made him late to breakfast. But this morning he was even ahead of time.

As soon as Mrs. Woodchuck had finished her meal of plantain leaves, Billy reminded her that she had promised to look at his play-house.

She followed him through the front door that he had made, walked to the end of the tunnel, and into the tiny chamber.

Once inside that room Mrs. Woodchuck took one quick look all around. And then she turned and ran out

as fast as her short legs would carry her, calling all the time to Billy to hurry. When she reached the open air Mrs. Woodchuck had to sit down and fan herself, she was so excited.

"Why did you come out so soon—and so fast?" Billy asked her.

"That's nothing but a trap," his mother said. "You haven't built any back door. And if a weasel or a mink or a snake should come in after you, there you'd be, with no way to escape.... I haven't had such a fright for years."

Billy Woodchuck looked foolish. He had never once thought about a back door. But after that he never forgot to build one. He saw that a back door was something that every house ought to have.

# XVII
# BILLY BRINGS THE DOCTOR

Billy Woodchuck was alarmed. His mother had come home very ill. At least, that was what Billy thought. It was a warm summer's day; but Mrs. Woodchuck seemed to be freezing with cold. Her teeth chattered so hard that the sound filled the whole house. And when Billy asked her what was the matter with her she did not say a word.

Then he was sure she was ill. For she was a great talker. This was the first time he had ever seen her when she could not speak.

Now, Mr. Woodchuck was not at home. And none of the children knew what to do. So Billy left the house and hurried over to find Aunt Polly Woodchuck —an old lady who was a famous herb doctor. Woodchucks for miles around came to see her when they were not feeling well. And she would give them a peppermint leaf to chew, or some tansy, or maybe a drink of catnip tea. And everybody said that her medicines never did anyone a bit of harm.

Luckily, Billy found Aunt Polly at home. And he quickly told her about his mother.

"You say her teeth chatter?" the old lady asked.

"Yes, Aunt Polly!"

"Do they make a clattering noise?"

"Yes, Aunt Polly!"

Aunt Polly Woodchuck nodded her head wisely.

"I thought so," she said. "It sounds to me like chills-and-fever. I'll go right back with you and see what I can do to help her."

So Aunt Polly and Billy started off together. Though he carried her basket of herbs, they could not go very fast, for the dear old lady was half blind.

But at last they reached Billy's home. And there they found his mother, sweeping the floor as spryly as if she had never known a sick day in her whole life.

"I see you're feeling better," said Aunt Polly. "Your son told me you were ill and I came right over."

Mrs. Woodchuck thanked her. And then she sent all the children out to play. As soon as they had left the room she said to Aunt Polly:

"I wasn't ill at all. I am ashamed to say that I was just angry. And since you are a near relation of ours, I'll tell you the reason. I'll tell you what happened.

"Yesterday Johnnie Green dropped a big stone through our front door. It almost filled the end of my hall, so I could hardly squeeze past it. And this morning I asked Mr. Woodchuck to help me dig around the stone. But he said his rheumatism was so bad that he couldn't do a bit of work. And then he went off and stayed away all the rest of the day.

"After I had done the work myself I went out to get a little fresh air and a bite to eat. And over in the meadow, what do you suppose I saw? There was a baseball game going on. And Mr. Woodchuck was playing so hard that he never noticed me at all.... Do you wonder I was angry?"

Old Aunt Polly said it was a shame. And she found a bit of celery in her basket, which she gave to Billy's mother.

"Just eat that!" Aunt Polly said. "It's good for the nerves."

Mrs. Woodchuck thanked her again.

"I wish you could give my husband something that would make him work," she said.

But for once old Aunt Polly Woodchuck didn't have the right sort of medicine.

"Laziness," she said, "is terribly hard to cure."

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# XVIII
# A WONDERFUL STICK

Now, Billy Woodchuck knew that he must beware of boys like Johnnie Green. And more than that, he had learned that boys with sticks are even worse than boys without them. Still, if he did not let Johnnie come too near him, there was not much danger.

So he was not at all frightened when he happened to catch sight of Johnnie Green crossing the pasture with a long stick over his shoulder. He was so far away that Billy Woodchuck sat up on a little hummock and watched him.

Pretty soon the boy saw Billy. And the moment he spied him he stopped and pointed the long stick at the plump young chuck.

That made Billy Woodchuck smile. He was not the least bit afraid. For if Johnnie Green should come nearer he intended to pop inside his mother's door.

The next moment Billy Woodchuck heard a sound just above his head—a sound like the sighing of the wind in the top of a pine tree. He thought that was very queer, for there was no wind at all that morning. And there was not a tree near him.

Then it thundered. And yet the sun was shining brightly and there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

But as he looked once more at Johnnie Green he was astonished to see a small cloud float from the end of that long stick and lose itself in the air.

All at once Billy Woodchuck was frightened.

He was afraid of Johnnie Green, for he saw that it was Johnnie who made the wind blow, and turned loose the thunder and the clouds. He noticed that Johnnie was doing something to that strange stick; and he expected that in another minute it would begin to rain. But he didn't wait to see. He felt that he would be far safer indoors. So he scampered straight home.

"What are you shaking for?" Mrs. Woodchuck asked, as Billy burst in upon her.

"I'm frightened," her son told her. "I've just seen Johnnie Green making thunder and wind and clouds."

"Be careful!" his mother said. "You know you are not allowed to tell tales."

"But I did see him," Billy insisted. "He pointed a stick at me, and the wind blew and it thundered; and I

saw a little white cloud come right out of the end of the stick."

It was Mrs. Woodchuck's turn to be upset. And she shook even more than Billy had as she said:

"My goodness, child! That was a gun! And it's a mercy you weren't shot. Don't you stir out of this house again to-day—nor you, nor you, nor you, nor you," she repeated, pointing to each of her other children.

And though Johnnie Green waited for some time, to see if a black head would not peep out of Mrs. Woodchuck's front door, nothing of the sort happened until after the sun had set and the cows had all gone home for the night. And by that time Johnnie Green was eating his supper.

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# XIX

# MR. WOODCHUCK MOVES

Mr. Woodchuck was annoyed. And he had good reason to be. The weather was fine and he had planned to spend the whole day sunning himself on a big rock not far from his own dooryard. But he had scarcely found a comfortable seat for himself, after finishing his breakfast, when he caught sight of Farmer Green and his hired man coming across the fields. They were headed straight for the pasture. And Mr. Woodchuck began to complain so loudly about his rest being disturbed, and how mean it was of Farmer Green to

come poking about other people's dooryards, that Mrs. Woodchuck came to her door to see what had happened.

As soon as she saw those men she called her children all home. It was too bad. But until the intruders had gone, their underground house was the best place for the whole Woodchuck family.

Mr. Woodchuck alone lingered in the doorway. He made up his mind that he would not go inside until he had to, anyhow.

A little later there came a terrible noise like a clap of thunder. Even in their house down there in the ground Mrs. Woodchuck and her children felt the walls shake.

"What can have happened?" she asked her husband. He had come in somewhat out of breath, soon after that frightful sound.

"It seems to be a new kind of gun," he said, "though I didn't notice that the men brought one with them. It went off close to an old stump; and you should have seen the wood and dirt fly. The noise has given me a headache. That is why I came into the house."

Now, Mrs. Woodchuck knew him very well. And though he tried not to let her know it, she saw that he was scared. But she did not mention that to him. There were the children, you know. She didn't want them to be frightened.

Now and then that booming, roaring, thundering sound would burst upon their ears again. And the earth would rock. Each time that happened Mrs. Woodchuck would go to her back door, where she could not be seen easily, and peep out. And what she saw filled her with fear.

Mr. Woodchuck did not help to make the day any pleasanter, for he was forever complaining about his lame back. He claimed that he needed sunshine; and he said that as soon as he could find time he intended to report Farmer Green to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"This is almost enough," he said, "to make me move to the West. I have a cousin who went there years ago. It is a long way from here—at least a mile the other side of Blue Mountain. Yes! I would move at once—except that I will not be driven out of my own house by anyone." He looked so fierce as he said that that Billy Woodchuck thought there could be no braver person in the whole world.

Then something happened that made Mr. Woodchuck change his mind very quickly. A roar ten times louder than any of the others seemed to split

their ears apart. Their house was swept by a great gust of wind—a thing that had never happened before. And strangest of all! their chamber became light as day!

That was when Mr. Woodchuck moved. He did not stop to take even a pocket-handkerchief with him. But then, he left in a great hurry.

# XX
# THE FAMILY ESCAPES

After that frightful noise, when her house suddenly grew light, and her husband ran away, Mrs. Woodchuck saw with dismay that there was a big hole in the ceiling. The earth had split open and the daylight was streaming in.

Mr. Woodchuck had been gone only a few moments when dog Spot began to bark. Mrs. Woodchuck could not see him; but she knew his voice only too well.

She was not quite sure what she ought to do. But there she was, with her house broken into, and five children on her hands.

Though she was frightened, she was brave just the same. And she had not the least idea of going anywhere without taking her family with her.

"Follow me!" she cried. And out of the room she hurried, with her youngsters close behind her.

Luckily, Mrs. Woodchuck's back door was just out of sight of the men. They did not see her at all while she waited and counted her children as they came through the doorway.

They were all there—all five of them. And as soon as she had counted the fifth one, Mrs. Woodchuck dashed off across the pasture, in exactly the opposite direction to that in which she could still hear old Spot barking.

Soon they were in the woods. And Mrs. Woodchuck led the way to an old empty house, where her grandmother had once lived. It was not so good a house as the one they had just left. But it was much better than none at all.

"Mother! What was that dreadful sound?" Billy asked when they had begun to get over their fright. His ears still rang.

"I'm not sure," said Mrs. Woodchuck. "But it seemed to me that Farmer Green was shooting away the stumps in the pasture. Perhaps you didn't know that there was an old stump quite near our bedroom. And when the gun went off it must have shot straight down into our house."

"But father said he saw no gun," Billy said.

"Yes, I know he did," Mrs. Woodchuck said. "And neither did I. But I smelled powder. So I can't be far wrong."

And, of course, the good old lady was not. Perhaps you have already guessed that Farmer Green was blasting away the stumps with powder. Anyhow, the Woodchuck family had a narrow escape.

And as for Mr. Woodchuck, he was never seen in those parts afterward. When anyone asked for him, his wife always said that he had gone on a visit to see his cousin, who lived in the West, and she really didn't know when he would come back again. "He didn't tell me that," she would explain, "for he left in a great hurry. But I am looking for him every day. The house is so quiet without him."

And that was quite true. For you see, Mr. Woodchuck was always groaning and complaining about his health.

Perhaps it agreed with him better where he went.

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# XXI
# AT HOME IN THE WOODS

Mrs. Woodchuck was not so sorry, after all, that she had to leave her home in the pasture. You see, she always moved twice a year, anyhow. Every fall she went into the woods to live; and every spring she returned to Farmer Green's pasture. And every time that Mrs. Woodchuck moved, she made a new house for herself.

To be sure, there were plenty of chucks that never went to all that trouble. They were the lazy kind. They just hunted around till they found an old, empty

house and then they moved in and made themselves right at home. But that was not the way of Billy Woodchuck's mother. She wanted everything neat and clean.

You remember that when Farmer Green blasted away the old stump near Mrs. Woodchuck's bedroom he tore a hole in the very roof of the house. And Billy and his mother and his brothers and sisters went into the woods and spent the night in a house where his great grandmother had once lived.

Mrs. Woodchuck said it would do, until she could dig a new one.

The very next morning she started to work. And all her children helped her.

Billy told his mother that they ought to build the back door first of all. You see he remembered what his

mother had taught him, early in the summer, when he made his play-houses.

"Nonsense!" she said. "Of course, we must have a back door. But we must dig it from the inside up, and not from the outside down."

And she explained that when you build a door by digging down into the ground, there's always a heap of dirt about it, which anybody can see. But when you are out of sight in your tunnel you can dig right up to the top of the ground and make a small, round door, beneath a hummock of grass, or a stone, or a stump. People must have very sharp eyes to see a back door that's made in that way, for the dirt all falls inside your house.

With all the help she had, Mrs. Woodchuck's new house was soon finished. But it was done none too soon. She had hardly carried in clean grass for the beds, when

her children began to feel very sleepy. At least, all of them except Billy. He was just as wide awake as his mother.

Even after his brothers and sisters had been tucked up for their winter's nap he was as spry as anything. And he told his mother that he was not going to spend the winter sleeping.

"Jimmy Rabbit says that it's great fun to play in the snow," he said.

Mrs. Woodchuck couldn't help smiling; for at that very moment Billy was yawning as wide a yawn as you ever saw on a young chuck's face. Though he didn't know it, he was already growing drowsy. And his mother knew very well that no matter how much he wanted to stay awake, in a short time he would be sound asleep.

Though Jimmy Rabbit came to Billy's house the very next day and called and called to him, he never came out at all.

# XXII
# GROUND HOG DAY

Billy Woodchuck had been asleep for a long, long time. The world above was white with snow. But no matter how hard the cold winter winds might blow, or how heavily the snow fell, in their underground chamber Mrs. Woodchuck's family were snug and warm in their beds.

At last one day late in the winter Billy heard some one moving about. He was so drowsy that at first he didn't stir. But finally he opened an eye and saw that it was his mother who had disturbed him.

"What is it, Mother? Has spring come?" Billy asked.

"No, my child," she answered. "At least, I do not know that it has."

"Then why are you getting up?" Opening both his eyes, Billy was surprised to see that Mrs. Woodchuck was putting on the warmest clothes she had. "You're not going out of doors, are you?" he inquired. His mother was already drawing on a pair of thick, red mittens.

"Yes," she said. "This is Ground Hog Day and I must go out and see what the weather is like."

"But I thought every day was Ground Hog Day for us," Billy replied.

"Well, you might say that it is," she agreed. "But this is different. To-day is what men call Ground Hog Day."

"May I come with you?" he asked. By this time he was wide awake.

Mrs. Woodchuck looked at him somewhat doubtfully.

"Young ground hogs like you aren't supposed to go out this time of year," she said. "It's still quite cold, you know."

"Please, Mother!"

"Well, you must wear plenty of warm clothing," his mother told him. And she gave him so many coats to put on that Billy would not have known himself if he had looked in the surface of the brook.

Of course, he couldn't do that anyhow, then, for the brook was covered with ice.

When Billy was ready they stole out of the room, leaving the other children sound asleep.

"Whew!" said Billy Woodchuck when they stepped outside at last. "How cold it is!"

The sun was shining brightly, for all the air was so chilly. And Billy had a fine time chasing his shadow around the pasture. But he never could quite catch it. Sometimes he thought he was going to.

But whenever he made a pounce at it his shadow moved just as quickly. And then he had to begin all over again.

"We'd better go in," Mrs. Woodchuck said at last. And she looked down rather sadly at her own shadow, as if something had disappointed her.

"Oh, no!" Billy pleaded. "Let's stay out a while longer."

"It's too cold," his mother answered.

"But just look at the sun! It's as bright as can be. And I'm not a bit sleepy. Besides, I think spring will come now—maybe to-morrow."

But Mrs. Woodchuck knew better.

"There'll be forty more days of winter," she said.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"It's the rule," she explained. "If we had not seen our shadows, that would mean that spring was here; and I would wake up your brothers and sisters. But there are our shadows, as plain as can be! And so we must go to bed again and sleep forty days longer."

"That's a silly rule," said Billy Woodchuck. "Who made it?"

"Don't ask so many questions," Mrs. Woodchuck answered. "Do as I tell you. Run in, now!"

And Billy had to obey. He grumbled a little. It seemed very foolish to him. And once more he asked his mother who it was that made such a horrid rule.

But Mrs. Woodchuck would not say another word. To tell the truth, she did not know the answer. She only knew that it was so.

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THIS IS THE END

PLEASE READ ME AGAIN!

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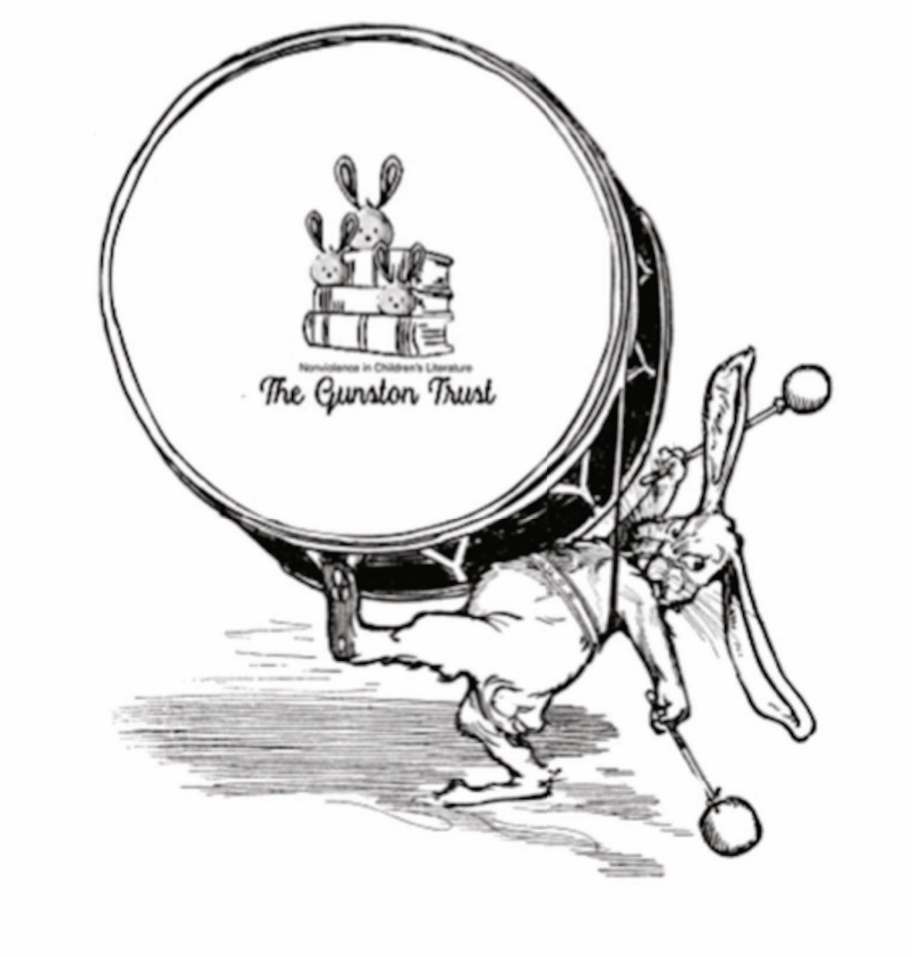
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